

NSC BRIEFING

29 October 1958

COMMUNIST CHINA'S COMMUNES

- Pilot model started April. Formal Decree 29 Aug.*
- I. The Chinese Communist leaders have embarked on one of the most far-reaching social experiments of modern times. Rapid progress is being made by the regime in the reorganization of Communist Chinese society into "people's communes."
- A. The formation of communes--new basic social and economic units in rural and urban areas--did not begin in earnest until July and August.
- B. By the end of September, however, Peiping claimed that over 90 percent of the peasant households had been enrolled--
some 500 million people
which would be a pace far exceeding that of the rapid collectivization drive of 1955-1956. *This includes towns + villages under 10,000. range from 5-50 people, average 20-*
- C. Communes *average some 20,000 members* each and are far larger than the collectives they are replacing.
1. Most communes now are synonymous with a township, but some are already being federated into units as large as an entire county.
- II. The social changes which the communes will bring to Chinese rural life will, in the long run, probably be greater than the economic.
- A. Peiping intends to create a "new way of life" through the organization of communal mess halls, housing, nurseries, schools and other "amenities", and thus break up the traditional Chinese family patterns.

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1. Communes will be the closest thing to total regimentation anywhere in the modern world.

III. Successful implementation of the program--which is by no means assured--would considerably strengthen the regime and enhance its stature in the bloc.

A. Peiping is presenting the communes as its own "creative development" of Marx and Engels. Some of its statements have implied that China is taking rapid strides toward the ultimate stage of Communist development.

B. The apparent Soviet coolness to this line is reflected in Moscow's lack of comment.

IV. In any case, the full burden of communal life probably will be felt by the ordinary Chinese only after some years. The communes represent Mao Tse-tung's greatest gamble, and there seems at least a possibility this time that he is asking more of his subjects than they can bear.

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